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ABSTRACT

A plan has been initiated in Georgia to ensure that project directors and evaluators are cognizant of and organized to meet criteria specified in the Identification, Validation, and Dissemination (IVD) guidelines. The evaluation/validation process involves eight steps: (1) evaluator training, (2) proposal screening, (3) critique of evaluation designs, (4) project director training, (5) prevalidation site visitation, (6) validation application, (7) validation review, and (8) evaluation of disseminated projects. All developmental projects reviewed since the eight-step procedure went into effect have received recommendations for validation from the out-of-state review panels. (BW)

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A METHOD FOR STRENGTHENING THE EVALUATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS AND IMPROVING THE CHANCES FOR DISSEMINATION THROUGH THE STATE VALIDATION (IVD) PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

Perspective

State funding of locally developed educational projects is usually provided with the intention that a certain percentage of the efforts will lead to materials and/or practices that will be worthy of state-wide dissemination. Evaluation efforts associated with such projects must include special efforts to collect, analyze and communicate information necessary to meet criteria for such dissemination. These criteria fit generally into the categories of effectiveness/success, exportability, and costs.

In many cases, funded education projects are intended to develop and test solutions to common problems rather than to address unique local needs, therefore, maximum impact of developmental projects can best be realized only if effective projects can be and are implemented in other locations. Education agencies should then have a vested interest in identifying and sharing successful programs. Through sharing successful practices and products, the costs of needlessly reinventing solutions can be eliminated through systematic adoption or adaption of a validated program (U. S. Office of Education, 1979).

Background

In 1979 the U. S. Office of Education released the revised standards and procedures included in the IVD guidelines (Identification, Validation and Dissemination) to assist state agencies in judging educational projects in relation to effectiveness, exportability, and cost factors. The state

validation procedures call for project directors and/or evaluators to provide data and documentation that the IVD criteria have been met. This evidence is offered in a formal validation proposal and is judged by a three member team of trained validators. On-site visits to obtain additional information are also involved. In most states the recommendation of the team is forwarded to the chief state officer who then certifies the project as being validated and therefore eligible for dissemination funds. Recommendations can also be made to forward the project documentation to the Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP) of U. S. Department of Education for a decision related to national dissemination.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to share a plan which has been initiated in the state of Georgia to insure that project directors and evaluators are cognizant of and organized to meet criteria to validate a project worthy of dissemination.

EVALUATION/VALIDATION PROCEDURES

The Georgia Department of Education through the Educational Improvement Unit administers an eight step evaluation/validation process to insure that state funded developmental projects attend to the criteria specified in the IVD guidelines. It should be noted that the process does not guarantee that the project outcomes will show effectiveness but rather that the evaluation plan will be designed to collect information and provide documentation related to the criteria. The general sequence and description of the process is outlined below.

I. EVALUATOR TRAINING

The state sponsors the attendance of selected evaluators at an IVD training session organized through the regional USDE office. Selection is based on academic background and experience, large program evaluation experience, and professional recommendations. Follow-up sessions have been designed to discuss and formulate procedures for improving the communications between the evaluator and project personnel. Of special concern is how the evaluators can remain sensitive to the needs of the project and still impress upon the personnel the importance of collecting data to meet the IVD criteria.

II. PROPOSAL SCREENING

All developmental project proposals are required to have an evaluation design included before they are received by the state department of education. A promising proposal which lacks an adequate evaluation design may receive some limited contigency funding if it is apparent than an appropriate design can readily be generated.

III. CRITIQUE OF EVALUATION DESIGNS

All evaluation designs are reviewed by one of several consultants who have received validator training through USDE. In addition, these individuals have served as evaluators on projects which have received regional or national validation and have also served as validators of projects in other states. The focus of the critique is two fold: first, are sound and logic research/evaluation procedures planned for; and, second, are valid data relevant to each of the validation criteria to be collected.

IV. PROJECT DIRECTOR TRAINING

Project directors from each funded project are required to attend a state-level workshop related to IVD procedures (usually the evaluator will attend with the director). Activities at this workshop address the principles of sound program research and evaluation and include a simulated review of a validation application. The activities are guided by individuals who have successful experiences in evaluation and validation efforts.

V. PREVALIDATION SITE VISITATION

First and second year on-site teams are composed of two trained validators, one an expert in measuring effectiveness, the others in assessing exportability. These teams judge the degree to which project personnel are documenting program activities and collecting information related to the criteria. An assessment of how well the project outcomes are meeting the criteria is also carried out. These procedures are guided by a set of guidelines which require the team to focus on aspects of the program which are relevant to the IVD criteria and future dissemination decisions and efforts.

VI. VALIDATION APPLICATION

Directors and evaluators are encouraged to submit a validation proposal if they judge the project to have met the IVD criteria. All proposals are reviewed by state department personnel and then forwarded to a trained validator for an opinion on the degree to which the documentation meets the standards set by the IVD guidelines and for suggestions for improving the proposals. Both the quality of the data and the method

of communication are critiqued by the reviewer. Judgements on the proposal are accompanied with feedback on how the document can be improved if it is to be submitted to a validation review team for review.

VII. VALIDATION REVIEW

In the event that a project exhibits the potential for receiving validation for dissemination, a validation team composed of three out-of-state members is formed. The Region IV USDE Regional Office provides coordination for identifying out-of-state members; while, each state has a designated individual who coordinates the validation review. The team receives the written validation proposal and is brought on-site to complete the collection of information needed for their decision. This process is guided wholly by the IVD document (U. S. Office of Education, 1979) and usually occurs during the third year of a project.

VIII. EVALUATION OF DISSEMINATED PROJECTS

All disseminated projects (including projects adopted from other states) are assessed at adopter sites for the degree to which the validation judgements related to effectiveness, exportability and costs are generalizable. This assessment serves two purposes: 1) the generalizabilities of the original validated effectiveness can be determined for different contexts; and 2) second generation demonstration sites which are geographically more convenient to potential adopters can be identified. These assessments are carried out by validators and/or personnel from the parent project.

In addition to the judgements on the generalizability of the effectiveness, two other closely related evaluation efforts are carried

out at this time. The first is an assessment of the dissemination training activities offered by the parent project; and, the second is a review of the adoption decisions and procedures of implementation at the adopter site. Since the latter is somewhat contingent on the dissemination training, these processes are interrelated and judgements are made on similar data basis.

It needs to be noted that because of the cyclic nature of the developmental projects in the state of Georgia, not all projects entered the process at Step II. But, all developmental projects were brought in line with the above procedures at the appropriate steps.

RESULTS

In order to judge the effectiveness of the above procedures, the following information has been examined: 1) evaluation plans of all existing and new developmental projects; 2) reports from evaluation and validation proposal reviewers; 3) reports from first and second year on-site team members; and, 4) reports from out-of-state validation team members. No reports from adopter sites as outlined under the new procedures (VIII) are yet available.

Thus far, all developmental projects reviewed since the eight step procedure went into effect have received recommendations for validation from the out-of-state review panels. Also, all existing projects have evaluation plans which have been judged to meet the data and design requirements of the IVD guidelines. And, first and second year on-site feedback has led to modifications in transactions and evaluation designs which should improve the chances for validation.

In the opinion of project and state department personnel, the procedures have added an important structure and focus to the evaluation of educational projects which helps to provide effective programs with not only an argument for more local effectiveness but also for fiscal support in dissemination efforts. In addition, the following have been identified as ancillary benefits of the process:

1. local school system personnel have upgraded or improved their skills in utilizing evaluation techniques to improve projects through feedback and modification based on data;

2. local system personnel should be able to better plan and organize future project or improvement efforts in relation to evaluation needs and requirements;

3. this type of evaluation provides data for decision-making in relation to future developmental efforts at the local and state level;

4. experiences gained from these efforts can be utilized in training programs to improve the level of competence of field personnel; and,

5. this type of evaluation system strongly supports the utilization of sound project management skills by local school system personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

In most cases, the receipt of government funding for developmental projects carries with it the expectation that procedures which lead to positive outcomes be disseminated. The establishment of a set of general criteria to aid in the validation of such projects is very necessary and is well met by the IVI process. The procedures adopted by the state of Georgia help to insure that project personnel will attend to the requirements of such a process. This enhances the probability that worthwhile ideas, materials, and practices will be shared on a state-wide basis. Thus, the quality of education should be increased at a reduced overall cost of time, effort and funds.